

House Republican Press Release

April 8, 2005
Press Office: 860-240-8700

Battling Teen Drinking In the Home



By State Representative Sonny Googins

Governor M. Jodi Rell has issued an official statement declaring April as Alcohol Awareness Month. Consider this: one spring day in 1997, a rumor quickly spread through Glastonbury that an informal call-in poll by MTV had named the town the number one drinking town in America. In July of 1998 two youths were stabbed to death at an unsupervised party at a home where alcohol was served. On Christmas Eve 2000, two teenage boys crashed their sports car into a tree after attending a party where a 41-year-old mother served alcohol to youths. In December 2002, a tragic crash resulted in the deaths of three teens and one young father, also the result of underage drinking.

Despite incidents like these, Glastonbury has many victories in the battle to prevent underage drinking. The town is one of Connecticut's first communities to pass an ordinance allowing police to fine underage youths at parties on private property where alcohol is being served. For more than ten years, Glastonbury has run the Coffee House Project, a Friday evening drug-free music and social event that attracts as many as 250 youths. And, GLAD, the local drug prevention council, has encouraged more than 3,000 families to sign a parent pledge to insure safe, supervised, alcohol-free gatherings for teens.

April is Alcohol Awareness Month, and it's a good time to reflect on how we as a state need to address the serious problem of underage drinking.

Members of the General Assembly's judiciary committee recently heard testimony from nearly two dozen people testifying in favor of House Bill 6901, An Act Concerning Underage Drinking, which holds a person accountable for hosting parties where underage drinking is taking place and prohibits the possession of alcohol by minors on private property. More than 20 people and organizations from across the state from Glastonbury to Danbury, provided testimony in favor of HB 6901. Some stories were personal. Others echoed the sentiments of parents, police officers and elected officials in local towns. Whether from the perspective of a teen, a parent, or the representative of an organization, all underscored in testimony the need for a uniform statewide law.

Glastonbury - along with 44 other towns across the state- has learned from its tragedies and already has a local ordinance on its books. In Connecticut, more than 60 percent of teen drinking occurs in the homes of teens, a place where parents can certainly set limits. In addition to obvious outcomes, allowing teens to have parties and consume alcohol in private homes leads to an array of other harmful consequences, such as vandalism, property damage and violence.

While the HB 6901 is a good bill, I urge lawmakers to consider a stronger penalty-a misdemeanor with community service option for first-time adult offenders. We need to include a penalty that can be both realistically enforced by police and prosecutors and send a message to parents and other adults that hosting parties and allowing minors to consume alcohol is not acceptable behavior. Equally important, the bill supports a parent's right to expect that others will not allow his or her child to drink.

Our children's futures depend on the extent to which we effectively reduce the environmental risk factors that contribute to the problem. HB 6901 attacks the issue of underage drinking at its core and protects our children from harm due to the consumption of alcohol. I urge my colleagues in the General Assembly to take the lead and pass an amended version of HB 6901, which I plan to introduce.

Sonny Googins is a member of the state House of Representatives, representing the town of Glastonbury in the General Assembly.